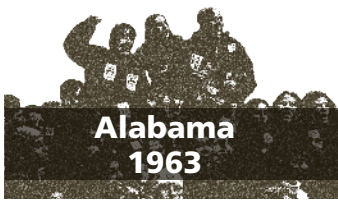




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**Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.** went to Birmingham in 1963 looking for a victory in a difficult situation. The city was widely regarded to be the most segregated in the United States and so dangerous for black residents that it had been nicknamed “Bombingham.” There had been 18 unsolved bombings in black neighborhoods in the previous six years, and in 1961 the city had been the site of a violent attack on a group of civil rights activists known as the Freedom Riders.

But the Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth of Birmingham sensed change brewing and invited King and his organization, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), to help desegregate the city. In the wake of the attack on the Freedom Riders, voters had decided to take power away from the three-man city commission and replace it with a mayor. The commission was led by Bull Connor, a member of the Ku Klux Klan and staunch advocate of racial segregation. Connor ran for mayor, but was defeated by a more moderate candidate. The commission refused to step aside, however, so the city in effect was ruled by two bodies, and Connor kept his position.

King began the Birmingham campaign in April with sit-ins and protests, hoping to fill the city’s jails with protesters. King himself went to jail, where he spent several weeks in solitary confinement and wrote his “Letter from a Birmingham Jail,” an iconic argument in defense of civil disobedience. Few Birmingham residents were willing to join the movement, however, and leaders of the SCLC decided to enlist students in the fight. The decision was controversial, and King originally opposed the idea. But organizers needed people, and students answered the call. Movement organizers spread the word about a planned protest via code on a popular youth radio station and trained student leaders in nonviolent protest. On May 2, a group of 50 students walked out of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church; they were arrested by police who

had been waiting in a park across the street. Students kept pouring out of the church in groups of 50 until 959 students had been sent to jail.

The next day, a thousand more children skipped school and gathered at the church to repeat the protests of the day before. The jails were full beyond capacity, so Connor authorized violent means, including water hoses and dogs, to control the protesters. When pictures of the violence against children in Birmingham hit the national press, the country was outraged. President John Kennedy said the pictures made him sick, and he responded by sending federal officials to Birmingham to try and negotiate an agreement between the two sides.

At the same time, local business leaders were feeling the pinch of a financial boycott. Since the beginning of the campaign, King had urged black patrons to boycott segregated downtown businesses. Protests had made white patrons stay away from the downtown area as well, and as the protests continued for days, business owners were desperate to find a solution to the problem. Demonstrations continued to escalate, police were overwhelmed and had no more room in jails for protesters, and national pressure continued to mount. Finally, on May 10, movement leaders and city officials reached an agreement that released the prisoners and integrated lunch counters, rest rooms, fitting rooms and drinking fountains.

The struggle in Birmingham continued, however. On Sept. 18, 1963, members of the Ku Klux Klan bombed the 16th Street Baptist Church, killing four young girls. Violence broke out periodically in the city, and black citizens had to struggle for several more years to earn equal legal status with their white peers; but their struggles paved the way for equality across the country. The tragedies and triumphs of the Birmingham movement accelerated the move toward passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which outlawed racial segregation.



*Students fill an overcrowded jail cell.*

### Discussion points

1. Martin Luther King Jr. and other leaders have been criticized for allowing young people to get involved in the civil rights struggle. Why do you think these leaders decided to involve students? Do you agree with their decision? Under what circumstances is it acceptable for leaders to enlist young people in their cause?
2. In defending his decision to encourage students to go to jail, Martin Luther King Jr. said he was empowering the children to play a role in earning their own freedom. Those children today are adults. What are some of the possible long-term effects of including students in social movements?
3. One student activist, Gwen Webb, has said about her participation in the protest: “A lot of people thought the kids were going to get hurt. But the reality was that we were born black in Alabama, and we were going to get hurt if we didn’t do something.” How might the realities of life in Birmingham have affected the students’ decision to march on the streets and go to jail? Under what circumstances would you be willing to take such risks?

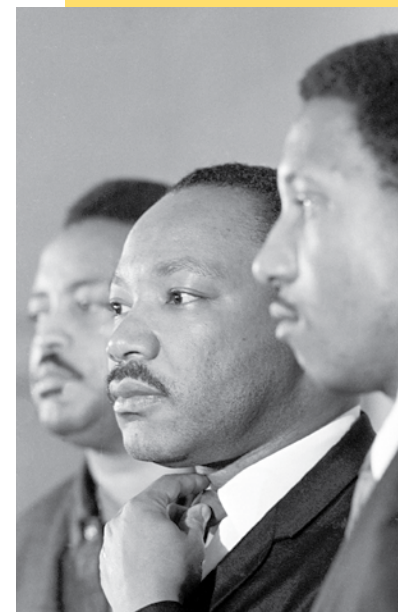
### Additional resources

[www.bcni.org/index.html](http://www.bcni.org/index.html)  
Web site of the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute.

<http://www.al.com/unseen/>  
The *Birmingham News* covers the struggle for equal rights throughout the city’s history.

[www.bplonline.org/resources/digital\\_project/SixteenthStBaptistBomb.asp](http://www.bplonline.org/resources/digital_project/SixteenthStBaptistBomb.asp)  
Original newspaper clippings and other documents related to the 16th Street Baptist Church and the racial violence that took place there.

**“A generation of young people has come out of decades of shadows ... and experienced the majestic dignity of a direct struggle for its own liberation. These young people... are an integral part of the history which is reshaping the world, replacing a dying order with modern democracy.”**  
—Martin Luther King Jr.







**Students in Burma** have been protesting the military regime since its inception in 1962. The military government has answered with unrelenting brutality. Protests are broken up by riot police who shoot into crowds of unarmed civilians. Democracy leaders are arrested and can be held for years on end without trial, tortured, or even killed. The violence has kept the population as a whole under the yoke of military dictatorship, but it also has fueled an underground democracy movement.

That movement burst to the surface in August 1988 in the largest public protests the country had ever seen. Economic pressures fueled smaller protests earlier in the year. Most Burmese live in hopeless poverty due to economic mismanagement that funnels state resources into the hands of the elite. Ne Win, who had ruled Burma since 1962, devalued some denominations of money, making 80 percent of the currency in circulation worthless. The government refused to compensate citizens for their losses, and public resentment began to simmer. Ne Win resigned in July 1988 and was replaced by Sein Lwin, a former general who in the past had carried out brutal repressions against students. The appointment outraged students; they began to organize in small groups that the government had difficulty controlling.

On Aug. 8, students marched into the center of Rangoon carrying red flags and wearing red bandanas to symbolize courage. They shouted protests as thousands of citizens came out to give them food and other support. As the day wore on, more than 20,000 people joined the demonstration. That night, the army received orders to fire; the violence continued for five days until the protesters finally yielded. As many as 10,000 people, mostly monks and students, died in the demonstrations.

Pro-democracy forces were not defeated, however. For the next two years, the leader of the National League for Democracy (NLD),

Aung San Suu Kyi, traveled around the country to talk to people about human rights and build support for a movement. Students were key partners in these activities, working side by side with the future Nobel Prize laureate. Those efforts paved the way for success in 1990, when the government announced it would hold democratic elections. The government was trying to increase its international image to attract foreign investors and believed that complete control of the media and a climate of fear within the country would ensure an election victory for the military party.

The people, however, overwhelmingly supported the NLD, which won more than 80 percent of the vote. The military nullified the results and began arresting democracy advocates en masse. Aung San Suu Kyi was placed under house arrest, where she remains as of 2008. Other democracy advocates also remain in prison or have been forced into exile out of fear for their lives. Activists have been tortured in military prisons, and many have paid for their political activism with their lives.

But that has not dissuaded others from continuing the call for freedom and human rights in Burma. Protests that were even larger than those in 1988 erupted in September 2007, when 100,000 people rallied behind Burmese monks to call for an end to military rule. Students and other democracy advocates began smaller protests in August, but the military quickly arrested participants. When the monks joined on Sept. 17, the government was not able to respond as harshly. Monks are highly revered in Burmese society, and they are a powerful ally of students and activists in the democracy movement. The government allowed protests to continue for a week before it took action. It is not known how many people died in the crackdown, but hundreds of thousands of monks were rounded up and shipped to detention camps and prison compounds. International pressure continues to be applied to push the junta to meet with Aung San Suu Kyi to negotiate a peaceful end to military rule. To date, these efforts have not been successful.



Young demonstrators clench their fists at a makeshift "democracy center" in Pegu, 80 kilometers northeast of Rangoon, Burma, during democracy demonstrations in 1988.

### Discussion points

1. In the video, Min Zin talks about how important it was for him as an activist to receive bags of rice from the Burmese people. Were those who contributed food also a part of the movement? What other types of supportive roles can be played by members of society who may be unwilling or unable to protest in the streets?
2. Burma has been a closed society since 1962, and very little information has gotten in or out. However, the Internet has proven a difficult tool for the regime to control. Cell phone videos of the demonstrations in 2007 were smuggled out via the Internet, so the world was much more aware of what was happening in Burma. What role might technology play in democracy movements? How can it be used to further the goals of democracy activists? How can it be used against them?
3. One of Aung San Suu Kyi's more famous quotations is, "Please use your liberty to promote ours." What do these words mean to you? How do you think you might be able to answer Aung San Suu Kyi's call?

### Additional resources

<http://uscampaignforburma.org/>  
The U.S. Campaign for Burma is one of the most prominent organizations fighting for freedom in Burma.

[www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art\\_id=753](http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=753)

This article from *Irrawaddy*, a news magazine dedicated to the struggle for freedom in Burma and Southeast Asia, covers the ongoing student movement.

[www.abitsu.org/?page\\_id=188](http://www.abitsu.org/?page_id=188)

The All Burma I.T. Students' Union allows access to student voices still inside Burma.



**"The students were protesting not just against the death of their comrades but against the denial of their right to life by a totalitarian regime, which deprived the present of meaningfulness and held out no hope for the future. And because the students' protests articulated the frustrations of the people at large, the demonstrations quickly grew into a nationwide movement."**

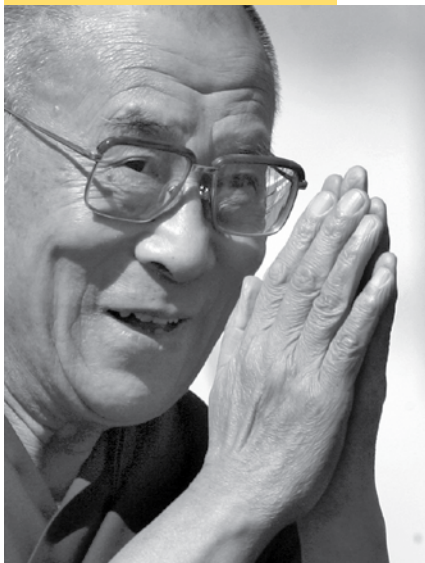
**—Aung San Suu Kyi**



**On April 15, 1989,** Hu Yaobang died of a heart attack. Hu was general secretary of the Chinese Communist Party from 1981 until 1987, when he was forced to resign for failing to condemn student protests that swept the countryside in 1986. He had been part of a reform-oriented group within the party that wanted to see limited political change in the direction of “socialist democracy.” Students at several rural universities were frustrated at the slow pace of the reforms and began protesting. Rather than control the protests, Hu proposed more sweeping reforms that went further than most party members were willing to go. Though the struggle forced him out of office, it also endeared him to students.

**“One of the most encouraging, moving and hopeful events in the recent Chinese history has been the democracy movement of 1989. The world had a rare opportunity to see the human face and spirit of China. Millions of Chinese brothers and sisters displayed openly and peacefully their yearning for freedom, democracy and human dignity.”**

**—Dalai Lama of Tibet**



When Hu died, students wanted to show their appreciation of what he had done to promote their cause. People started gathering in Tiananmen Square the day of his death to pay their respects, but large crowds did not gather until April 22, when the official mourning ceremony was to be held in the Great Hall on the square. Student leaders had drafted a petition asking for many of the democratic reforms Hu promoted and requested permission to present it to Premier Li Peng. Li refused the students’ request; angry students responded by boycotting classes. The government countered by publishing an editorial that dubbed the students “a small handful of plotters” who were attempting to overthrow the Communist Party. The editorial convinced students that wider action needed to be taken for the government to listen to their concerns.

That action came on April 27, when students from 40 universities marched on Tiananmen Square. The protesters were joined by thousands of others representing a broad swath of Chinese society; eventually about one in 10 Beijing residents participated in the demonstrations. The protesters were united in calling for democracy, but their backgrounds and motivations were varied, as were their tactics. A group of students began a hunger strike on March 13 to draw more attention to their cause in anticipation of a visit by Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev for a historic conference with Chinese officials. The hunger strike was not called off until students learned of the government’s plan to declare martial law. The end of the strike was not enough to appease the government, however, and military forces attempted to enter the city center on April 20. So many people filled the streets that soldiers were not able to reach the square and were forced to move to the outskirts of the city.

Soldiers re-entered the city on June 3 with orders to clear the square by 6 a.m. the next day at all costs. Soldiers fired on civilians who stood in their way and beat students who refused

to move. Student leaders on the square debated whether or not to call off the demonstration and decided ultimately to put it to a democratic voice vote. Participants have since disagreed about which side was actually louder, but leaders at the time claimed that the “leave peacefully” vote won and students began filing out of the square. By 5:40 a.m., the soldiers had accomplished their mission, although small skirmishes continued throughout the city. The number of people killed is disputed. It is surely higher than the official government estimate of 200 to 300, mostly soldiers. Most estimates put the number closer to 1,000, with some as high as 7,000.

The demands of the protesters ultimately were not met, but the effect of what happened at Tiananmen Square continues. The event hangs as a perpetual dark cloud over the human rights record of China and still affects international relations. The Chinese people showed that they can unite in face of the government and stand together in calls for a government accountable to the will of the people. Following the massacre, the government drafted a list of the 21 most-wanted student leaders, who either fled the country or were arrested. Similar dangers face those who become acknowledged leaders of civil rights movements in China today. Some people are still taking risks, despite the danger; and hope remains that the spirit of Tiananmen will one day inspire the country as a whole.

### Discussion points

**1.** In the video, Chaohua Wang says that the Chinese people are less trustful of their government post-Tiananmen. Yet, there have not been major demonstrations in China since 1989. Some suggest that economic progress has had a chilling effect on the democracy movement. Does improved



*A student leader leads a victory cheer as hundreds of students disrupt government efforts to stop the protests.*

economic status increase the potential costs of political activism? Can you draw comparisons with the situation in Burma, where there has been no economic progress since the regime came to power?

**2.** The Tiananmen Square protesters were a large group of people with similar ideals, but few concrete goals. How might this have affected the outcome of the protest and the future of the movement?

**3.** When students’ lives were in danger, leaders of the protest decided to put the decision up to a vote rather than tell students to behave one way or another. Do you agree with this decision? When is it a leader’s job to command protesters, and when should leaders leave important decisions to the protesters themselves?

### Additional resources

<http://edition.cnn.com/SPECIALS/2001/tiananmen/>  
CNN revisits the tragedy 12 years later with an in-depth look at the demonstration and its consequences.

[www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB16/documents/index.html](http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB16/documents/index.html)

A chronological archive of original documents relating to different aspects of the massacre.

[www.indiana.edu/~easc/resources/TEAMS/1997/pdf/tiananmen\\_square\\_protest.pdf](http://www.indiana.edu/~easc/resources/TEAMS/1997/pdf/tiananmen_square_protest.pdf)  
Lesson plan for general teaching of the Tiananmen Square massacre for middle/high school students.





**The student movement** has a long history of bringing about change in Iranian politics. The nature of the movement has shifted over time, and though most of the prominent student groups operating in Iran today are creations of the state, they are using their power to call for dramatic governmental reform in the name of freedom, democracy and human rights.

Though Iranian students are traditionally political, their demands have not always been so radical. The current student movement began its interest in reform in the lead-up to the 1997 presidential elections. University enrollment expanded widely in the late 1980s and early '90s, rising from approximately 117,000 students in 1982 to 1.5 million in 1997. The economy, however, was not expanding to

**"Even though I have lost the use of my kidney, even if I have lost my hearing, if my bones ache from constant beatings, and I am not able to walk easily, to prove my innocence and defend my rights, in this Evin prison, I shall still cry out to the world, 'Long live Iran. Long live freedom. Justice shall prevail.'"**

**—Akbar Mohammadi, student activist who died in prison**



accommodate the new graduates. High inflation and unemployment motivated students to push for change within the government, and they campaigned on behalf of Hojatoleslam Mohammad Khatami, a reformist candidate.

Due in large part to the student support, Khatami won the election on a platform of civil society and rule of law. Some of his key goals included making clear legal routes through which laws and changes to the constitution would be enacted; promoting freedom of speech by allowing journalists and ordinary citizens to criticize the government; strengthening relations with the West by allowing European embassies to reopen; and beginning dialogue among people of different faiths both inside and outside the government. Iran's constitution severely constrains the power of the president, however, making any decision he makes subject to unelected, theocratic leaders. The constitution is not conducive to a democratic government, and Khatami was in constant struggle with powerful religious forces within the government. The students quickly became frustrated with the slow pace of reforms.

A turning point came on July 9, 1999, when conservative forces within the government closed a reformist newspaper. Students arranged a peaceful protest. That night, Iranian police and vigilante forces raided a dormitory at Tehran University, killing one student, injuring 20 others and destroying the students' homes in retribution for the protest. More than 25,000 people in 22 cities across the country went to the streets to protest the violent government action. Protesters were

only met with more violence, however, and by the time the protests ended six days later, 4,000 students had been arrested. Many were tortured, and some are still in prison nearly a decade later. Khatami condemned the violence, but was unable to protect

students who were engaging in the civic activism he himself had condoned.

Since the 1999 protest, the student movement has become increasingly vocal, calling not only for reform within government but changes to the constitution that would be essential for any democratic government to form. Massive student demonstrations took place in 2002 and 2003, and students continue to protest the conservative government of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. State control over universities has increased since Ahmadinejad came to power in 2005, and constant harassment of any students who become prominent has kept the movement essentially leaderless.

The Iranian regime has faced many challenges in its 40 years of rule, and has survived each one. But the current government is becoming increasingly irrelevant to an Iran driven by youth. Seventy percent of the population is under age 30. Young people in Iran today don't remember the revolution that overthrew the Shah when their parents were of university age, but they grew up in the age of Khatami's reforms and consider the liberties, however limited, gained through his reforms to be rights rather than privileges. Today's youth tend to be less religious than their parents, more interested in global fashion and music, and continue to be frustrated at the sagging Iranian economy. None of these things alone means a democratic revolution is looming. In a country where the government is intent on controlling every aspect of a person's personal and moral life, simple acts, such as wearing a loose headscarf or listening to rap music, are inherently political. Iran's students continue to show they are a force in Iranian politics, and they are looking to the international community for support and models.



*Student protesters chant slogans at riot police near Tehran University in the first demonstration to draw students and ordinary Iranians to streets en masse and confront the powerful hard-liners opposing political and social reform.*

### Discussion points

1. The Iranian democracy movement lacks a leader such as Nelson Mandela, Aung San Suu Kyi or Martin Luther King Jr. How might this affect the movement's prospects for success?
2. Globalization has created what many consider to be an international youth culture in which similar trends in fashion and entertainment are popular with young people in many countries. In a country where so much of the population is younger than 30, what impact might these commercial trends have on political movements?
3. The Iranian government justifies much of its repression in the name of religion. How does this compare with the role of religion in the civil rights movement in the United States? How important is religion as a motivator within a social movement?

### Additional resources

[www.pbs.org/frontlineworld/stories/iran/thestory.html](http://www.pbs.org/frontlineworld/stories/iran/thestory.html)

PBS explores the Iranian democracy movement, including interviews with student activists.

[www.daneshjooyan.org/english/memory/1999/200999a.html](http://www.daneshjooyan.org/english/memory/1999/200999a.html)  
The Alliance of Iranian Students' Web site.

[www.gozaar.org/index.php?language=Persian](http://www.gozaar.org/index.php?language=Persian)

An online Iranian human rights forum with many links to student activist organization *Tahkim-e Vahdat*.



**Black students** in South Africa were frustrated in the 1970s. They had been born into a system in which they were second-class citizens in their own country. Segregation had been a way of life in South Africa since the arrival of the first Europeans, but it was formalized into the political system of apartheid in 1948. Apartheid, which is the Afrikaans word for “separateness,” divided South African society into racial categories. The system was designed to reduce interaction between races and keep the black majority subjugated to white minority rule. Racial categories were assigned at birth and dictated every aspect of life in the segregated society.

During the 1950s, new laws strengthened the oppressive apartheid system. These laws designated “homelands” in which people were forced to live based on racial and ethnic designations, made traveling into white areas without documentation illegal for blacks, established separate but not necessarily equal public facilities, and prohibited marriage between races to retain racial purity. One of the new laws was the Bantu Education Act, which brought all black schools under control of the apartheid government. Curriculum was designed to promote skills that would be useful in menial jobs to serve white people rather than promote educational development. An addition to the act in 1974 established Afrikaans, the language spoken by the Dutch-descendant white minority, as a language of instruction in black schools. Many teachers and students did not speak Afrikaans, however, so the rule had a disastrous effect on the already substandard education system.

Resistance to these actions, organized primarily by the African National Congress (ANC), was strong at the beginning, but the government was highly effective at suppressing the opposition. In 1964, Nelson Mandela and seven

other ANC leaders were sentenced to life in prison. Still other leaders were forced into exile, leaving the movement disorganized. At the same time, state-sponsored violence and arrests against political activists scared most black citizens away from activism; by the end of the 1960s, the resistance movement largely had been broken.

Though resistance was declining, discontent was rising, especially among black youth. The decree establishing Afrikaans in black schools was the final spark that ignited student action. Student leaders began quietly organizing a mass protest and on June 16, 1976, between 15,000 and 20,000 students in Soweto, a township of the South African capital of Johannesburg, marched en masse from their classrooms. The students kept their activities secret from their parents, who were too frightened for their safety and livelihoods to act against the oppressive regime. The students had planned to march peacefully across the township, singing protest songs, and then return home. But police opened fire on the students, killing and injuring dozens of them.

The violent police reaction set a match to the pent-up resentment among the black community and sparked riots that spread across black townships of the country. For the next year, youth rioted, protested and set fire to buildings that symbolized government power. Police continued their violent repression of the movement. The student demonstrations alone did not succeed in bringing down the regime, but they did give new life to the resistance movement. It would take another 15 years of struggle for the movement to succeed. Apartheid was dismantled in 1991, and Nelson Mandela became South Africa’s first black president in the country’s first free elections in 1994. Leaders from the South African movement, including Mandela, continue to work for freedom and have aided dissidents in oppressive situations around the world. South Africa is considered to be an inspiring example of how a united people can demand, and attain, their freedom.



*Students march through the streets of Soweto in protest in June 1976.*

### Discussion points

1. Students in Soweto, like those in Birmingham, acted in ways their parents could not or would not. Why are students more willing than adults to take a stand in certain situations?
2. Authoritarian regimes often use education as a tool of indoctrination. Why would repressive governments try to control the minds of young people in a society? What types of things might they want to prevent students from learning?
3. The South African movement for democracy was ultimately successful, but it took many decades to abolish apartheid. The Soweto uprising played an important part in a much larger movement. Discuss the role that students can play in social movements. What causes are they fighting for today?

### Additional resources

<http://overcomingapartheid.msu.edu/sidebar.php?id=5>  
History and analysis of the struggle against apartheid with many classroom resources, including a focus on the Soweto uprising.

[www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5489490](http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5489490)  
NPR interviews with leaders and participants in the uprising.

[www.sahistory.org.za/pages/governance-projects/june16/june16.htm](http://www.sahistory.org.za/pages/governance-projects/june16/june16.htm)  
The South African History Organization focuses on the role of youth in overcoming apartheid.

**“At the forefront of this 1976-77 wave of unrest were our students and youth. They come from the universities, high schools and even primary schools. They are a generation whose whole education has been under the diabolical design of the racists to poison the minds and brainwash our children into docile subjects of apartheid rule. But after more than 20 years of Bantu Education, the circle is closed and nothing demonstrates the utter bankruptcy of apartheid as the revolt of our youth.”**

**—Nelson Mandela**





## Analyzing Social Movements

In his struggle to rid India of colonial rule, Mahatma Gandhi became a pioneer of civil disobedience and nonviolent resistance. His teachings offer many useful criteria for assessing and understanding social movements. They have inspired great leaders around the world, including Martin Luther King Jr., Nelson Mandela, and Aung San Suu Kyi. In addition to tearing down obstacles to freedom through civil disobedience, the movement Gandhi led sought to build a more just society through what he called the constructive program.

"The constructive program is building the new society in the shell of the old," Gandhi said in his 1945 pamphlet *Constructive Programme: Its Meaning and Place*. He argued that true independence could not be achieved until people



**"Gandhi was fully committed to the belief that while nonviolence had an impressive power to protest and disrupt, its real power was to create and reconstruct."**

—Michael Nagler, professor and founder of the Peace and Conflict Studies Program at the University of California at Berkeley

embraced concepts such as racial and gender equality, economic independence, and environmental sustainability. "Civil disobedience in terms of independence without the cooperation of the millions by way of a constructive effort is mere bravado and worse than useless," Gandhi said.

His movement not only called attention to problems with society and government, but offered people a positive alternative. Gandhi believed that mass actions must be aimed at achieving specific goals rather than abstract ideals. "Civil disobedience can never be directed for a general cause such as for independence," Gandhi said. "The issue must be definite and capable of being clearly understood and within the power of the opponent to yield." Thus, when Martin Luther King Jr. encouraged demonstrations and boycotts to catch the attention of leaders in Birmingham, he had specific demands for how he wanted those leaders to break down the institution of segregation. Equality may have been the larger goal, but it was only attainable through the gradual achievement of specific objectives aided by civil disobedience.

Gandhi called for a constructive program in 18 areas of Indian society. Three of them were: untouchability, khadi and universities.

### Untouchability

**The Problem:** Indian society, like many in Southeast Asia, was divided into groups called castes. When the system was established thousands of years ago, it was based upon one's occupation, but eventually evolved into a hereditary system. People in the lowest level, commonly called "untouchables," were traditionally excluded from the rest of society. Untouchability was formally banned by the Indian Constitution in 1950 and significant progress toward equality has been made. Discrimination persists, however, especially in rural areas, and at the time Gandhi wrote, the practice was widespread.

**The Action:** Gandhi considered discrimination by caste a disgrace to Indian society and argued that in order for a country to be free, all its citizens must be treated equally. He lobbied the government

extensively to ban the practice. In addition, he made a point of disregarding the caste system in his own life and even adopted an untouchable child. He called upon all Indians to "make common cause with them and befriend them in their awful isolation."

### Khadi

**The Problem:** Khadi is a traditional Indian cloth made on a spinning wheel called a charkha. Colonization disrupted this tradition in two ways: the British centralized agriculture in India and began shipping Indian cotton abroad; and the influx of imported clothing reduced demand for domestically made cloth. Indian cities prospered under this centralized system, but rural areas became destitute. Gandhi believed that the core of the problem was a growing gap between educated urban Indians who consumed imported goods and those in the rural areas who still produced domestic goods.

**The Action:** Gandhi swore off all foreign-produced cloth, wore only clothes made out of khadi, and encouraged his fellow citizens to do the same. More than that, however, he requested that every citizen of India spend at least 30 minutes spinning cotton each day. For Gandhi, the spinning wheel and khadi became symbols of sacrifice and independence from foreign influence. He encouraged urban Indians to spin their own cotton in order to reconnect them to physical labor and their heritage.

### Universities

**The Problem:** Higher education in colonized India was designed by, and to the benefit of, the British. Gandhi said he was sympathetic to the desire for knowledge and "entrance to the charmed circle," but he chided students for "the waste of precious years in acquiring knowledge of an utterly foreign language which takes the place of the mother tongue." More than anything, Gandhi lamented that access to modern scholarship was



*Mahatma Gandhi addresses supporters in Bombay, India.*

only available in English, which led to the decline of native Indian languages.

**The Action:** Gandhi encouraged students to continue their studies, but conduct them in a way that would benefit their country as much as themselves. He insisted that students should also learn Hindustani, the closest thing to a national indigenous language in the diverse Indian state. He also requested that students translate the knowledge they learn into Hindustani to keep the language relevant. This request, combined with his constructive program for adult literacy, would have heightened education for all Indians.

### Discussion Points

1. For each societal problem Gandhi identified, he also laid out an action plan that had a clear role for individual citizens. What did he call on his fellow countrymen to do in his constructive program? Was his advice empowering? achievable? effective?
2. Following Gandhi's lead, have students list their primary concerns in society today. What changes must be made in order to address those concerns? What actions could individual citizens take to bring about larger changes? How could they implement those changes into their own daily lives?
3. The movements in the Take a Stand video and the chronology below all contain elements of civil disobedience. Have students choose one movement to study in more depth. What goals were the activists working toward? Did the presence or absence of concrete objectives change the outcome? Can they identify a constructive program working alongside the civil disobedience?

# 50 Years of Student Activism: A Chronology

## 1956: Hungary

On Oct. 23, 1956, students and members of the writers' union presented a list of 15 demands for governmental change at a rally of 20,000 protesters. Government officials denounced the movement on the radio, prompting protesters to tear down a 30-foot statue of Joseph Stalin from the center of Budapest, the capital city of the Soviet satellite state. Fighting broke out between Hungarian secret police and students, who stole arms from military depots, and continued until the Soviet Union invaded Budapest on Nov. 4. Soviet forces crushed the resistance in only six days, killing 2,500 Hungarians and forcing 200,000 to flee the country as refugees.



*Although it was ultimately crushed, Hungary's student revolution was an inspiration to other student activists in post-Communist countries, who began a series of revolutions. The student group Otpor, for example, shown here leading mass demonstrations in Serbia, was essential to the overthrow of violent dictator Slobodan Milosevic. That movement is discussed further in this guide.*

## 1958: Venezuela

Marcos Perez Jimenez was appointed president of Venezuela in 1952 after the ruling military government illegally voided the results of a national election. Jimenez was a staunch autocrat who violently suppressed dissent to his policies. When students began to organize against the junta, Jimenez closed the universities. That did not stop students, however, and by 1955 they had formed covert organizations that led a mass protest with workers. The navy joined the students, as well as other military defectors, and it eventually became an armed revolution. Jimenez was forced to flee the country and found refuge in the United States.

## 1964: Sudan

Senior general Ibrahim Abbud rose to power in Sudan in 1958, after years of chaotic post-independence governance. Despite some early success, Abbud was unable to develop stable economic and social policies. He also fueled ethnic strife by ordering a mass expulsion of foreign missionaries and attempting to force Arab culture and religion on Christians living in the south. Protests that began at the University of Khartoum spread into the civil service and trade unions. Unrest culminated in the 1964 October Revolution, which began as a general strike that crippled the country and ended in days of deadly rioting. Abbud eventually dissolved the government and established a civilian authority to provide leadership during the transition to civilian rule.



*French students protest for education reforms.*

## 1968: France

Parisian university and high school students came out en masse in May 1968 to call for education reform. The wider union community joined students after a violent police attack led to hundreds of student injuries and arrests. By May 20, approximately 10 million workers, roughly two-thirds of the French workforce, were on strike. Workers began calling for increased workers' rights and demanding that President Charles de Gaulle resign. De Gaulle was forced to go into hiding in Germany, but refused to step down. He dissolved the National Assembly and called for general elections, scheduled for June 28. Workers gradually returned to their jobs, and the revolutionary feeling faded with no significant change in government.

## 1973: Thailand

A coup in 1971 brought the military government of Colonel Narong Kittikachorn to power. Disastrous economic decisions and corruption led to food shortages and deepening poverty. By October 1973, a small group of university students and professors began circulating a petition calling for a new constitution. They were arrested. Demonstrations calling for their release grew over several weeks until by Oct. 13, some 400,000 people had gathered at the university and marched through the city. The military cracked down the next

day, killing hundreds of people. Deep splits within the military, however, prevented the response from continuing. The military government ceded control to the royal structure of Thailand in an attempt to appease protesters, but demonstrations did not cease until the king had expelled the primary instigators of the violence.

## 1980: South Korea

In May 1980, General Chun Doo-hwan declared martial law, dissolved the National Assembly, arrested opposition politicians and proclaimed himself president. Students protested the coup in the city of Gwanju on May 18. Though the protest began peacefully, paratroopers attacked the students and continued violent repression as protests spread. By the time military forces regained control of the city, about 200 people had died in the violence and thousands more were injured. Nearly 1,400 people were arrested, seven people were sentenced to death and 12 received life sentences for their activism. Students were outraged by the government response and continued to show their opposition to the Chun regime. Unfortunately, the students were never able to overthrow him. Citizen pressure eventually prevailed, however, and perpetrators of the massacre were tried for their crimes in 1996. Chun was sentenced to death, but he and seven other convicted politicians were pardoned as part of a day of national reconciliation in 1997.



*South Korean students protest the murder of a fellow activist.*



*Philippine students boycott their classes over the rising cost of education.*

## 1986: Philippines

On Feb. 16, 1986, students participated in a mass civil disobedience campaign against Ferdinand Marcos, who had increased his stranglehold on power since he was elected president in 1965. The government had fraudulently declared Marcos the winner of national elections, causing students to boycott classes, laborers to call a general strike and thousands of people to flood the streets. When parts of the military joined the public a few weeks later, Marcos was forced to flee the country and seek refuge in the United States. For students, this demonstration represented the culmination of more than a decade of resistance against the Marcos regime. In January 1970, thousands of student demonstrators stormed Malacanang Palace. Six students died and many more were injured in what became known as the battle of Mendiola.



## 50 Years of Student Activism: A Chronology *(continued)*

### 1998: Indonesia

Students began their opposition to President Suharto's military regime in 1970, only four years after he took power. Repression of student groups mounted slowly until 1978, when the state clamped down hard on universities, installing military agents on campus and requiring students to wear uniforms and recite oaths of loyalty to the government. Resentment simmered until the spring of 1998, when the Asian economic crisis crippled Indonesia's economy. Students began open demonstrations that slowly attracted the rest of the populace. On May 20, half a million citizens marched through the streets of the capital, Jakarta, and demonstrations spread around the country. Suharto lost control of the military and was forced to resign on May 21.



*Indonesian students demand democratic reforms at a rally.*



*Members of Otpor, a student group known for elaborate street demonstrations, protest against former Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic.*

### 2000: Serbia

Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic had kept power for a decade by frightening the public and intimidating the broken opposition. Ahead of the September 2000 elections, however, students intervened. They formed an organization called Otpor (the Serbian word for “resistance”) and began a campaign of nonviolent activism. They printed bulletins and newsletters attacking the Milosevic regime and spray-painted their symbol of a clenched fist all across the capital, Belgrade. Otpor worked with opposition parties to form a viable coalition and focused on mobilizing the electorate. Thanks to their efforts, the election had a higher turnout than ever before. Milosevic lost the election but refused to cede power. The group then organized a mass protest at the Parliament building in which thousands of Serbians filled the streets in opposition to Milosevic, who was forced to step down without a single shot being fired.

### 2006: Chile

A series of student protests from late April to early June, which came to be known as the “Penguin Revolution” because of the school outfits that students wore, became the first major political crisis of President Michelle Bachelet's administration. The students had a list of short- and long-term demands that would have improved quality and expanded access to public schools. The protest peaked on May 30, when 790,000 students participated in a general strike and marched through streets around the country in the largest student demonstration in three decades. During the first week in June, Bachelet made several reforms that not only addressed students' demands, but established a presidential advisory council for education that reserved seats for high school students.



*Students are arrested by riot police in a protest in Chile.*

### Discussion questions

1. Where do the movements featured in the **Take a Stand** video fit on this timeline? What similarities exist between the struggles in each of these countries? What differences make each of these struggles unique?
2. In most instances, students were driven to action by some spark. What motivated students to act in these examples? Why were they suddenly willing to take risks?
3. What goals were students trying to achieve in these struggles? In which countries were they successful? In which did they fail? What factors determine the success or failure of a social movement?



# Take a Stand

## Activism Online

**The Internet** is a powerful tool for young activists to organize and mobilize. Social networking opportunities allow students to interact with other engaged youth across the nation. The information and resources available can help youth make an effective case for addressing their concerns and develop a plan to do so. The following list is only a sampling of the sites available, but does provide some useful tools.

### Plug Into a Network

**Youth Activism Project**  
[www.youthactivism.com/Home.php](http://www.youthactivism.com/Home.php)

This site advocates for youth activism and provides practical tips for students working to make a change.

**Do Something**  
[www.dosomething.org/](http://www.dosomething.org/)  
Students can find ways to engage based on the cause that drives them.

**SoundOut**  
[www.soundout.org/tools.html](http://www.soundout.org/tools.html)  
Toolkit for students looking to take an active role in their school.

**Facebook**  
[www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com)  
The Causes application helps you find other young people interested in uniting for change.

**Global Youth Action Network**  
[www.youthlink.org/gyanv5/index.htm](http://www.youthlink.org/gyanv5/index.htm)

A UN-affiliated organization that provides resources and communication tools for youth organizations around the world.

### Choose a Cause

**STAND**  
[www.standnow.org/](http://www.standnow.org/)  
Student anti-genocide coalition with blog and ideas for global youth action.

### Student Activist Network

[www.civilrights.org/campaigns/student\\_activist/](http://www.civilrights.org/campaigns/student_activist/)  
The student arm of the Civil Rights Coalition helps students fight for civil rights and equality.

**Amnesty International**  
[www.amnestyusa.org/studentcenter/pagedo?id=1041074&n1=4&n2=1140](http://www.amnestyusa.org/studentcenter/pagedo?id=1041074&n1=4&n2=1140)

The Student Center of this international group engages youth on human rights issues.

### Stay Informed

**Wiretap**  
[www.wiretapmag.org/](http://www.wiretapmag.org/)  
Online magazine for socially conscious youth.

**Youth as E-Citizens**  
[www.centerforsocialmedia.org/ecitizens/index.htm](http://www.centerforsocialmedia.org/ecitizens/index.htm)

Compiles Web sites that promote an online community of youth activists.

### Weigh In

**Civic Voices**  
[www.civicvoices.org/](http://www.civicvoices.org/)  
Students from around the world can take part in an online survey about civic action and their teachers can submit student essays on citizenship for publication.

**The following** is an excerpt from a song by Matisyahu, a reggae musician and orthodox Jew who expresses his faith through his music. The song is featured in **Take a Stand**. He has described the song as a call to arms for youth who are looking for something meaningful in their life to take control and find significance rather than acting out in frustration.

## "Youth"

by Matisyahu

Some of them come now  
Some of them running  
Some of them looking for fun  
Some of them looking for away out of confusion  
Some of them don't know where to be  
Some of them don't know where to go  
Some of them trust their instincts  
That something's missing from the show  
Some don't fit society  
Their insides are crying low  
Some of them teachers squashed the flame  
'fore it had a chance to grow  
Some of them embers still glow  
Them charcoal hushed and low  
Some of them come with hunger suppressed  
Not fed them feel the death blow, yo  
[CHORUS:]  
Young man control in your hand  
Slam your fist on the table  
And make your demand  
Take a stand  
Fan a fire for the flame of the youth  
Got the freedom to choose  
You better make the right move  
Young man, the power's in your hand  
Slam your fist on the table and make your demand  
You better make the right move  
"Youth is the engine of the world"

### Discussion Points

1. When talking about what drives him to spread his views through music, Matisyahu told *Chabad.org Magazine*, "It wasn't long ago that I was in college, and just searching for meaning, searching for something real. I wasn't into following the mainstream and going with the flow; I knew I had to find something that was real, that had meaning, that had relevance. ... All of my songs are influenced and inspired by the teachings that inspire me. I want my music to have meaning, to be able to touch people and make them think."

Do you think music can be a form of civic action? How does art relate to the other forms of political expression you studied in this video?

2. One of the key lines in the song is that "youth is the engine of the world." Do you agree with this statement? If so, how would you rate the success of that engine in driving the world today? What factors contribute to the power and effectiveness of that engine?

3. Matisyahu advises young people to take control and make demands of the world. What demands would you like to make personally? Do you think other young people share your priorities? In what ways should those demands be made? For what issues would you be willing to take a stand?